National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook

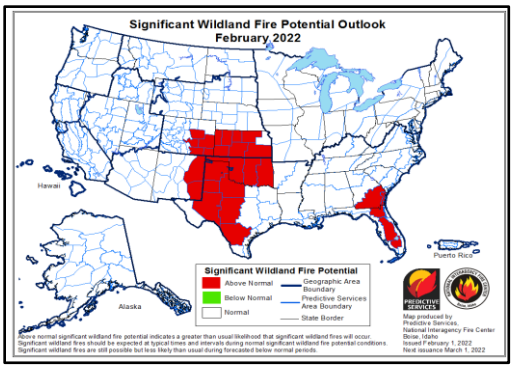
Predictive Services
National Interagency Fire Center

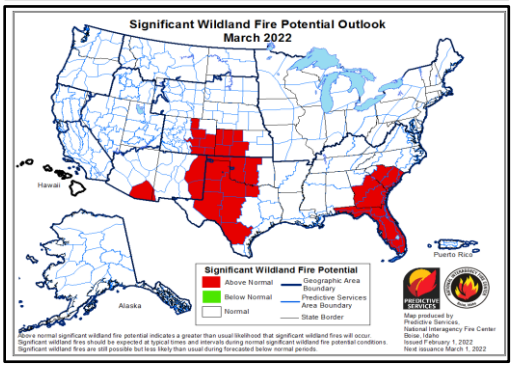
Issued: February 1, 2022
Next Issuance: March 1, 2022

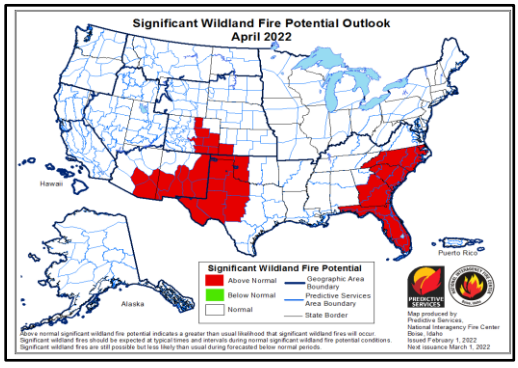
Outlook Period – February through May 2022

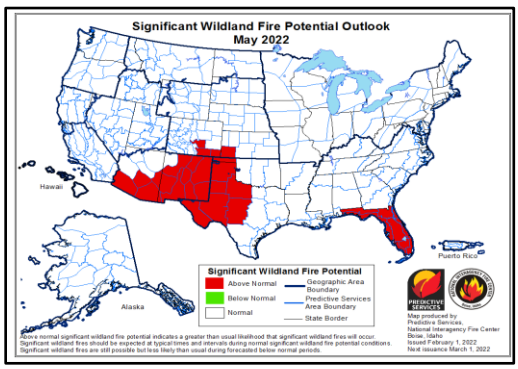
Executive Summary

The significant wildland fire potential forecasts included in this outlook represent the cumulative forecasts of the ten Geographic Area Predictive Services units and the National Predictive Services unit.









Significant fire activity in January was minimal, but there was a significant fire near Big Sur, CA during an offshore wind event. Periods of offshore winds across coastal California and dry and windy conditions on the southern and central Plains led to elevated and critical fire weather conditions throughout the month. Overall, timely weather reduced significant fire potential in areas of concern. Additionally, prescribed burning continued to be active in all geographic areas.

Nearly 90% of the West remains in drought, with most of the Plains and Texas also in drought. Most of Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley saw an expansion or exacerbation of drought as well. Temperatures were below normal across much of the central and eastern US and generally around normal in the West. Much of the West had a dry January, but snowpack is mostly 75% to 125% of average. Above average precipitation across the Carolinas and Virginia reduced drought and fire potential concerns, while most of the Plains and Great Lakes observed below average precipitation.

Climate outlooks through spring indicate near to below normal temperatures and near to above normal precipitation are likely across the northern half of the West into the western Great Lakes. Above normal precipitation is also likely across the Mid-Mississippi and Ohio Valleys and through much of the Great Lakes and Northeast into the Mid-Atlantic. However, drier than normal conditions are expected for the southern half of the West, southern and central Plains, and portions of the Southeast, with near to above normal temperatures likely as well across these areas. Guidance also indicates this could be a potentially busy severe weather season east of the Plains, which usually portends to periods of critical fire weather conditions on the Plains behind the severe weather.

Above normal significant fire potential is forecast for much of the central and southern Plains through March while persisting on the High Plains and eastern slopes of the Front Range through April into May. Above normal potential is forecast in portions of south Texas and the Hill Country during February then spreading across far southwest Texas, much of New Mexico, and southern Arizona by May. The westward retreat of above normal significant fire potential in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas is following the expected green-up procession.

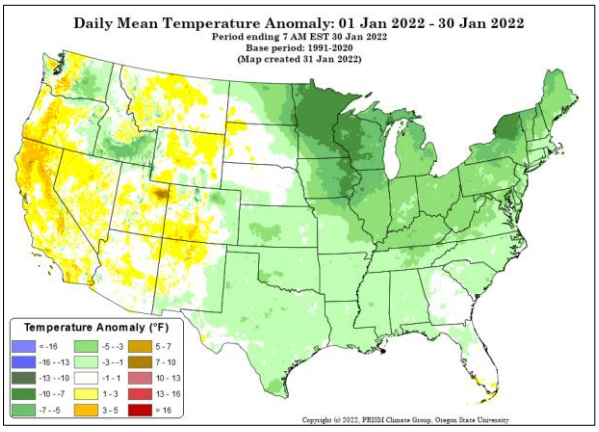
Due to the recent widespread and in places, heavy precipitation across the Carolinas and Virginia, forecast above normal significant fire potential was removed in February. However, above normal significant fire potential is forecast in portions of the Florida Peninsular into southeast

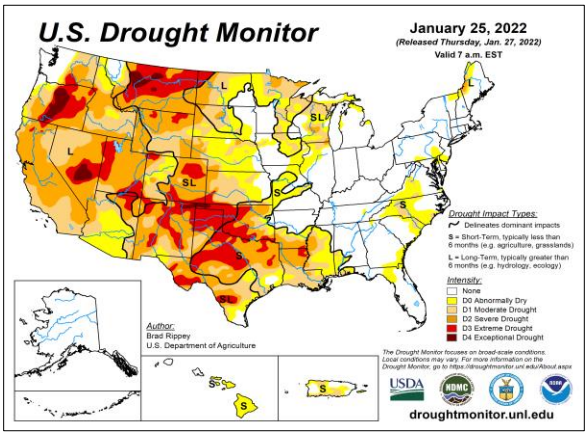
Georgia in February and likely persisting through the spring. Additionally, above normal potential is likely to expand across Florida and into the Carolinas during March and April. Lingering above normal potential is forecast to remain across Florida in May. Areas of south and east Texas into the Lower Mississippi Valley will continue to be monitored for above normal potential.

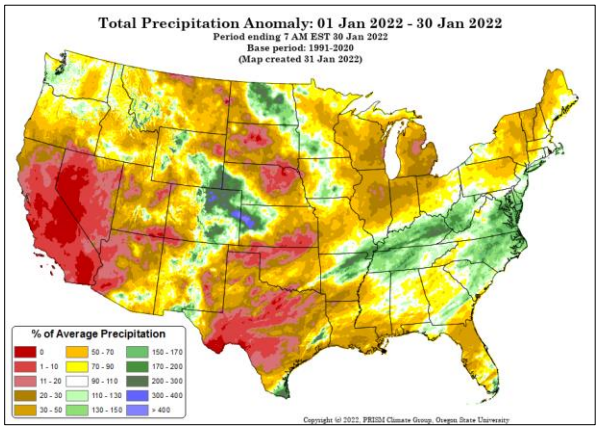
Past Weather and Drought

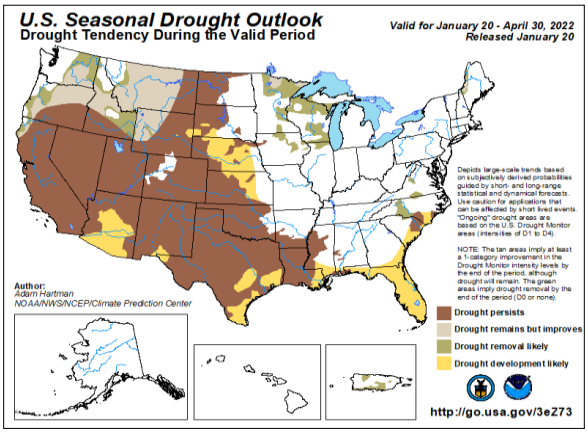
After a wet December across much of the West, precipitation was below average for most of the West in January, with temperatures slightly below normal to slightly above normal. Drought severity was reduced in portions of the West mostly due to the lingering effects of a wet December and very early January, but nearly 90% of the West remains in drought. Snowpack is generally between 75% and 125% of average in the West according to data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Temperatures were mostly below average across the central and eastern US in January. A few big precipitation events helped reduce drought in Virginia and the Carolinas and led to above normal precipitation across the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys. Multiple Nor'easters also affected the East Coast. On the Plains, mostly dry conditions prevailed except for a couple of snow events on portions of the central High Plains, with drought conditions worsening on much of the Plains into the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Significant fire activity was minimal during January. However, there was a significant fire near Big Sur, CA that burned actively for multiple days during an offshore wind event. Multiple offshore wind events affected coastal California this month, which has reduced some of the beneficial effects from a wet December for California. Periodic dry and windy conditions continued to affect the High Plains, but no significant fire events transpired in January. Overall, timely weather mitigated significant fire potential in areas of concern during the month (e.g., Carolinas, southern High Plains).





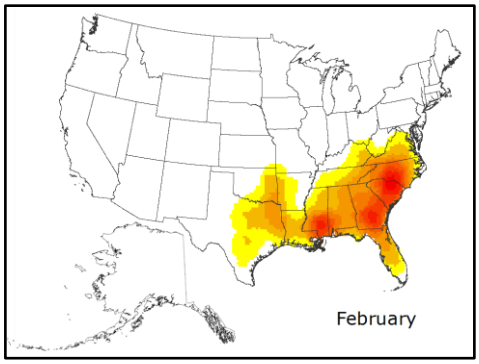




Left: Departure from Normal Temperature (top) and Percent of Normal Precipitation (bottom) *(from PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University).* **Right: U.S. Drought Monitor (top) and Drought Outlook (bottom)** *(from National Drought Mitigation Center and the Climate Prediction Center)*

Weather and Climate Outlooks

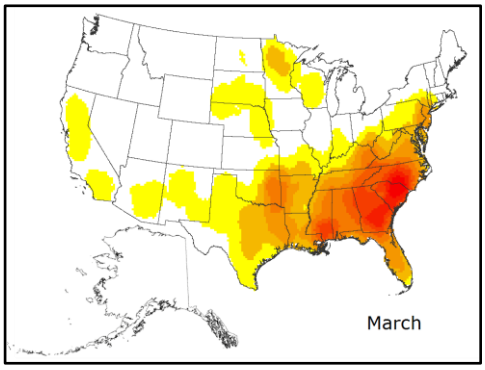
La Niña conditions are present, with below average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) over much of the equatorial Pacific Ocean. The Climate Predicter Center (CPC) forecasts La Niña to continue into spring, which will continue to have a major impact on the next few months' weather and climate. There is also a strongly negative Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) that continues to impact the large-scale pattern. Other teleconnection influences, such as the Madden-Julian Oscillation and Arctic Oscillation may still have roles in shaping the weather and climate patterns, but La Niña with the negative PDO will likely remain dominant influences on the pattern.



Geographic Area Forecasts

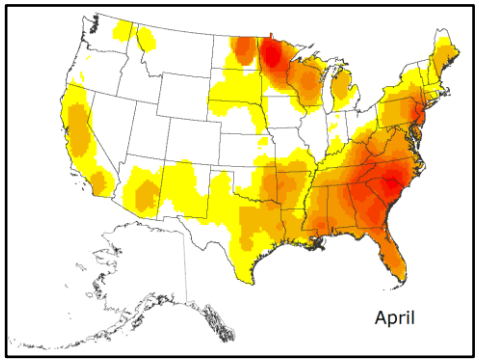
Alaska: Normal significant fire potential is expected in Alaska through May.

Winter is firmly in place over Alaska, with snow covering the entire state except for some coastal locations in south-central and southeast Alaska. The US Drought Monitor shows no drought in Alaska, and the water content of the snowpack over Alaska's Interior is well above normal as of late January. Fire activity in Alaska has been non-existent. Fuels are wet, frozen, or snow-covered statewide.



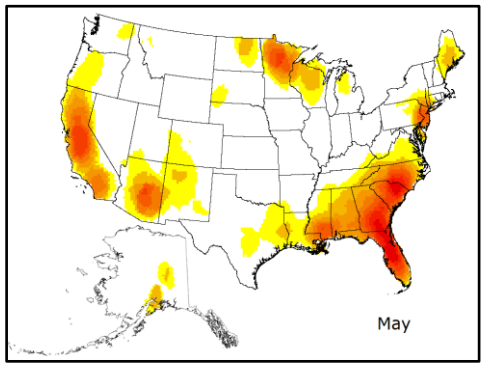
Fire danger forecasts reflect little or no burning potential until the snowpack melts in the spring. The first wildfires of the season typically occur in April at lower elevations as dried grasses from the previous season are exposed. As spring advances, wildfires typically become possible at higher elevations by May.

The current La Niña conditions are expected to fade by summer. This trend offers no strong climate or significant fire potential signal for Alaska currently, thus, normal potential is forecast.



Northwest: Potential for significant fires in the Pacific Northwest is forecast to be low (i.e., normal) through May.

A series of Pacific frontal systems arrived early in January continuing the moist and cool trend from December, but the weather dried out for much of the last half of the month. Regardless, rain and snow accumulated above average for January over much of Washington except for the Columbia Basin, and most of Oregon accumulated below average precipitation. Temperatures were generally below average in eastern Washington and near or slightly above average in western Washington. Temperatures were above average for much of Oregon except the Cascades and higher elevations in northeastern Oregon. Despite the drier weather in the last half of the month, snow amounts at the higher elevation reporting stations were near average over most of the region and above average in the Oregon Cascades and northern Coast Ranges.



Normal fire season progression across the contiguous U.S. and Alaska shown by monthly fire density (number of fires per unit area). Fire size and fire severity cannot be inferred from this analysis. (Based on 1999-2010 FPA Data)

Fire activity declined and only a couple of initial attack incidents were recorded in Oregon. The incidents were less than a tenth of an acre and quickly extinguished by firefighters. Pile burning tapered off as the regular bouts of snow limited travel at lower and higher elevation sites. A few ditch burning activities occurred briefly in Washington and pile

burning activities dotted the landscape throughout the month. Snow coverage has diminished or disappeared at lower elevations in the Cascades and basins, so there is potential for activity to increase slightly. Continued freezing temperatures and high dew points indicate the potential for anything to burn for long is limited.

Large fuels and fire danger indices have shown improvement and are at seasonal low levels. Heavy snow cover is down to most middle elevations of the mountain ranges in the geographic area. The large 100-hr and 1000-hr fuels have been well saturated with moisture. Lower elevation fine fuels, litter, duff, and soils are saturated with moisture, so only a few areas on dry exposed slopes may have potential for fire activity to surface. The low temperatures, along with average to above average precipitation and continued passage of moist air masses have kept spread and ignition potential very low. A dry spell of several days and warmer temperatures would be needed to elevate the potential for a large fire. Those conditions are not likely to surface as daylight is still limited.

Long range outlooks from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and other sources continue to suggest winter and spring will most likely be wetter and colder than normal for Washington and northern Oregon. Overall, the potential for significant fires is expected to remain at normal (i.e., low) through May.

Northern California and Hawai'i: All areas are forecast to have normal significant fire potential through May. Normal is defined as less than one large fire per PSA February through May.

Conditions during January were very different compared to December when drought conditions improved. January was largely comprised of unusually warm periods and dry weather associated with a persistent blocking upper-level ridge over the West Coast. There were no widespread precipitation events, with just a few light events across the northern portions of North Ops. The weather pattern created below to well below normal precipitation. Snowpack was 135-140% at the beginning of the month but dwindled down to around 100% or normal by the end of the month. Dead fuel moisture, which started out unusually high at the beginning of the month, lowered considerably as the month progressed, although cool and long overnights helped mitigate the drying from being critical. The expansive herbaceous green-up continued below 2500 feet, but there wasn't much additional growth due to the cool overnight temperatures and drying of topsoil. Shrub moisture remained in a mixed state of flammability, with some of the lowest elevation species experiencing green-up while others lay in a dormant and likely reduced fuel moisture state due to continued drought conditions. Gusty wind and low or marginally low humidity periods were more frequent with a significant offshore event during January 21-22. Wildfire ignitions were limited during the first three weeks but noticeably increased the last week, especially tied to the significant offshore wind event. Pile burning remained the main project type until the last week when there was a mix of landscape and pile burning.

The weather outlook from February through May is for near to below normal temperatures and near to below normal precipitation. Some atmospheric similarities that occurred in January should occur in February with March being more uncertain in terms of precipitation. There will be periods and areas of flammable dead fuel moisture values the rest of the winter into the spring, although it is not known for how long as some timely moisture intrusions are expected. Herbaceous fuels across the low elevations will remain in a green-up state during most of this period, although the possibility exists for earlier curing during May. Shrub or woody moisture readings will remain in a mixed flammability state due to long-term drought conditions and green-up. Intermittent gusty wind and low humidity periods will continue and will lead to periods of higher initial attack.

Sea surface temperature (SSTs) anomalies surrounding the Hawai'ian Islands are near to above normal. Temperatures throughout the region are expected to be above average from February through May due to these above average SST anomalies. Precipitation was mixed across the islands during January, with above normal across the northern islands (i.e., Kauai and Oahu) and below normal across the southern islands (i.e., Molokai, Maui, and Big Island). The 4-month weather outlook calls for above average precipitation February through May, especially along the windward side of the islands as Trade Winds are typically enhanced during a La Niña state. Significant fire potential is forecast to be normal during the outlook period.

Southern California: Significant fire potential will be near normal across the entire geographic area from February through May.

There was a major pattern change in January as upper-level high pressure that was over the central Pacific Ocean during the last three weeks of December moved east to just off the California coast causing upper-level troughs to move inland farther to the north over the Pacific Northwest. This dominant ridge caused temperatures to be above normal across the geographic area in January. There were only brief periods when temperatures were near to a little below normal. The dominant upper-level ridge resulted in no significant storms this month and only scattered light showers occurred on a few days. Almost the entire geographic area received less than 25% of its normal precipitation. Even though there was very little precipitation this month, the Sierra snowpack is around normal due to the well above normal precipitation that occurred in December. Santa Ana winds occurred throughout the month as troughs dropped into the Great Basin and the Desert Southwest from the Pacific Northwest. Most of the Santa Ana events were weak, but there was a strong event January 21-22.

The well above normal precipitation that central and southern California received in December continued to alleviate drought conditions. The drought is now moderate to severe instead of severe to extreme, which the region experienced in December. Due to the lack of precipitation in January, the 1000-hr and 100-hr dead fuel moistures have decreased substantially from the well above normal values at the end of December. The 1000-hr dead fuel moisture is now near normal, while the 100-hr dead fuel moisture is between the 10th percentile and average. Current warm temperatures along with the well above normal rainfall in December have caused widespread green-up to occur across the lower elevations. The live fuel moisture has increased from below normal at the beginning of the month to around normal.

SSTs off the West Coast warmed to a little above normal in January, which likely caused the eastward movement of the upper-level high over the Pacific Ocean. SSTs over the Gulf of Alaska and over the Equatorial Pacific remained well below normal. SSTs off the West Coast will likely remain a little above normal in February causing the area of high pressure just off the California coast to be stationary. Thus, temperatures will remain above normal while precipitation stays below normal. The number of Santa Ana wind events will remain above normal in February as troughs move up and over the high- pressure area and drop into the Great Basin and Desert Southwest. Forecast guidance shows that SSTs off the West Coast will cool to a little below normal in March and April. This will likely cause the high pressure just off the California coast to move to the west and allow upper-level troughs from the Gulf of Alaska to move into California. Expect below normal temperatures and near to a little above normal precipitation across the region in March and April. As the high pressure shifts westward, expect the amount of Santa Ana wind events to become much less in March and April. The SSTs off the West Coast look to warm to a little above normal once again in May, which will likely cause the high-pressure area over the Pacific Ocean to shift back to near the California coast. Expect above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation across the region in May.

Northern Rockies: Significant fire potential in the Northern Rockies Geographic Area is expected to be normal for February, with all zones out of season and prescribed burning mostly completed for the season. All the Northern Rockies are expected to remain with normal fire potential through May.

La Niña has continued to bring a wetter pattern to portions of the Northern Rockies Geographic Area. Areas west of the Continental Divide have generally seen above normal precipitation and a building snowpack. Some areas of northern Idaho and northwest Montana have been removed from drought or

have improved to be just abnormally dry. However, east of the Divide, precipitation has been less abundant and drought continues, although moisture has increased in these areas as well, with near normal precipitation in January. Portions of northern Montana, east of the Divide, have also seen improvement, with exceptional drought being scaled back, especially in southwest Montana.

Eastern areas of the Northern Rockies Geographic Area have fuel moistures below average. Live fuels are covered with snow in most mountain locations. East of the Rockies, central Montana, and Yellowstone National Park fuels have above normal fuel moisture. However, fuels are well below normal and excessively dry in east-central and eastern Montana, as well as North Dakota and northwest South Dakota. No significant fire activity is ongoing, with periodic initial attack, generally for less than an acre.

With La Niña forecast to continue into the spring, northern and central Idaho and Montana, west of the Divide, are likely to have above normal precipitation and cooler than average temperatures. East of the Divide, central Montana should see close to normal precipitation and cooler than normal temperatures into the spring. However, by May, precipitation amounts may begin to become below normal once again. Eastern Montana and North Dakota, as well as northwest South Dakota may trend cooler but drier by spring. Forecasts for April and May remain uncertain. Significant fire potential is forecast to be normal in the Northern Rockies for February and out of season, with significant fire potential likely remaining near normal March through May as fire activity normally begins to increase.

Great Basin: Significant wildfire potential is forecast to remain low (i.e., normal) into early spring, with increasing activity, but still normal, for April into May. Significant long-term drought has improved but remains across much of the Great Basin. Areas that have seen significant drought improvements have received enough rain to cause fine fuel growth to be a concern in the upcoming fire season and may increase fire potential this summer across parts of Nevada, Utah, and Idaho.

Temperatures over the last 30 days have been above normal across most of Nevada, Utah, and the Arizona Strip, and below normal across Idaho and Wyoming where the storm track has been more focused. Cool and wet storm systems moved across the northern portion of the Great Basin mostly through the first half of January, with the wettest conditions across central Idaho and western Wyoming where precipitation increased to 150-200% of normal. Precipitation was minimal and below normal farther south across the remainder of the Great Basin. However, over the last two weeks, precipitation has been well below normal in all areas of the Great Basin, with predominantly warm and dry conditions and only weak storms affecting the northern Great Basin.

Wetter storms did occur in November and more so in December across Nevada, Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, which brought the snowpack to well above normal. Even with some melting, the snowpack remains near to above normal in all areas. Snowpack is 100-130% in most areas of the Great Basin, except for southern portions, which are slightly higher with respect to normal at 140-170%. The drought has improved across the Great Basin but remains. Extreme to exceptional drought continues only over parts of central and eastern Nevada into western and southeast Utah. Moderate to severe drought is located across the rest of the Great Basin. The most significant drought improvements due to recent moisture over the last couple of months have been across Idaho into northern and western Nevada where the drought is only in the moderate category. It will be these areas that will need to be monitored through the spring for fine fuel growth. Drought areas are expected to improve across Idaho into Wyoming over the next few months, but likely remain unchanged farther south.

Fuel moisture has returned to normal or above normal for the time of year in most areas over the northern and eastern halves of the Great Basin due to the wetter and cooler weather. Southern and western areas of the Great Basin have remained dry, with fuel moisture below normal for the time of year. However, some upcoming storms will bring some showers and cooler temperatures including southern areas at times in February, which should increase fuel moisture at least somewhat regionwide.

Rain that occurred in August into September over the eastern half of the Great Basin triggered new areas of fine fuel growth. These fine fuels could add to the fine fuel load for the 2022 fire season, depending on winter compaction. Otherwise, carryover fine fuel loading remains low across Nevada, Idaho, and

Wyoming, with little if any carryover heading into next fire season. However, the heavy October precipitation moistened lower elevation soils in some areas to possibly help propagate new growth during spring, and impressive storms in December also brought much needed moisture to lessen the drought in many areas. This may add up to additional fine fuel growth in the spring and will be monitored as it would greatly impact lower elevation fire potential.

Overall, fire activity remains low across the Great Basin, and Great Basin remains at preparedness level one. A few small fires occur at times, but they have been easily extinguished. The shift toward increased prescribed burning continues across the Great Basin.

La Niña will continue to drive the weather pattern over the next few months, with storms affecting the northern half of the Great Basin at a higher frequency than southern areas. The forecasts are calling for cooler and wetter than normal conditions across the northern half of the Great Basin overall through April, with storms tapering off in May. How far south the wetter conditions extend will fluctuate at times, with the best chances of more continuous wet weather across Idaho, Wyoming, far northern Nevada, and northern Utah. Predominantly warmer and drier conditions are expected over the southern half of the Great Basin through May. Drier and warmer conditions could expand farther north into Utah and Nevada in May, which would perpetuate the growing season after spring wetness in some areas.

Fire potential is expected to remain low (normal) through April but may start increasing by April or May in the southern Great Basin, which would still be considered normal. There is still the possibility of above normal potential for May in the southern Great Basin, but the forecast will keep normal conditions at this time through May due to low confidence. However, we will continue to monitor the precipitation throughout the spring and the weather outlook for May, with the possibility of above normal conditions in some areas of the southern half of the Great Basin.

Southwest: Normal significant fire potential is anticipated across most of the region in February. However, areas of above normal potential are expected on the plains of eastern New Mexico during February that will continue through April into May. Areas of above normal are expected to emerge across the southern tier of the Southwest Area in March and expanding across more of the geographic area by April into May.

Wetter periods from late September into mid-October and from late November into late December helped lower significant fire potential for portions of the geographic area, mainly along and west of the Continental Divide. However, the eastern one-third of the geographic area has experienced primarily minimal to no significant precipitation over the past several months, especially the past 60 – 90 days, and this dryness has been accompanied with generally normal to above normal temperatures. The expectation is for a continuation of this general trend into mid-spring. Eastern New Mexico is likely to continue with drier and warmer than average conditions into May, although some cooler periods appear likely in the next few weeks.

Areas across the eastern plains of New Mexico will likely experience brief periods of above normal potential during February. By March, above normal significant fire potential is expected to expand across southeast Arizona and southern New Mexico due to warmer temperatures, continued drier than normal conditions, and more frequent downslope wind periods. This pattern is typical of a La Niña influenced winter and spring, especially east of the Divide. Southern Arizona will more than likely rise into above normal significant fire potential by April, with areas along and north of Interstate 40 in Arizona into northwest New Mexico more than likely having the lowest potential regionally as May arrives.

Rocky Mountain: Significant fire potential across most of the Rocky Mountain Area (RMA) is expected to be normal from February through May. The exception will be for portions of Kansas and eastern Colorado, where above normal significant wildland fire potential is expected due to the persistence of above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation during the outlook period that will keep fuels receptive and promote rapid spread during wind events.

Anomalous warmth continued to expand east of the Front Range across eastern Colorado and the central Plains in November. Warmer temperatures were notable during downslope wind events as weather

disturbances moved over the region. A pattern change that started the latter half of December and continued through January brought colder and wetter weather systems across the RMA. Cold fronts brought periods of much colder temperatures that overspread the geographic area by the end of January. A few winter storms moved across the RMA in January and finally delivered much needed precipitation to areas east of the Divide and across the High Plains. Widely scattered snow showers occurred occasionally over portions of South Dakota and Nebraska and across the Front Range Foothills and plains of eastern Colorado into western Kansas. These events brought only a few inches of snow in any one area before melting several days later. While snowfall across Wyoming and the West Slope of Colorado has been adequate with near to above median values, deficits continue to be observed in areas east of the Divide. The greatest deficits have occurred across eastern Colorado along the Front Range Foothills, Palmer Divide, and adjacent Plains. The recent precipitation resulted in modest improvements in drought across northwest Wyoming and northwest Colorado. However, the persistence of severe to extreme drought continues across western portions of the RMA. The precipitation deficits and abnormally warm conditions observed east of the Divide have contributed to the extreme drought conditions now prevalent across eastern Colorado, with moderate drought and abnormally dry conditions across most of Kansas and Nebraska.

During January, fire danger indices east of the Continental Divide and across the High Plains remained elevated, especially along the Front Range and south of the Palmer Divide in Colorado. However, farther north into Wyoming fire danger indices have been lower due to precipitation events. The influence of a waning La Niña created the north-to-south split in winter precipitation patterns. High pressure to the west of the RMA and low pressure to the east resulted in a persistent upper-level northwesterly flow over the area. This pattern supported a rain shadow effect east of the Rocky Mountains to limit precipitation events across the Plains and contributed to periods of strong downslope winds and warm temperatures. So far this winter, fine fuels have remained exposed and subjected to repeated wind events across the Colorado Foothills and the Plains. Adequate overnight humidity recovery and short burning periods mitigated fire danger in many of these areas from becoming critical overall except during downslope wind events and frontal passages.

Despite snow accumulating in the mountains where conditions have remained out of season, the anomalously warm, very dry, and breezy weather pattern east of the Divide continued to support both prescribed and wildland fire activity. A significant wind event occurred on the central and southern Plains December 15 with widespread strong and damaging winds and isolated gusts approaching 100 mph. This wind event resulted in the rapid development of several large wind-driven fires that burned over 122,000 acres across western and central Kansas in less than a day. Following that event, fuels remained dormant and available to burn.

Another period of increased fire activity occurred across the northern Front Range Foothills during December 30 at a time that is typically considered “off-season”. Like the previous event, very strong downslope winds gusted more than 100 miles per hour for a short period with intermittent gusts up to 70 mph into the evening. This wind event contributed to the rapid growth and spread of the Marshall Fire near Superior, Colorado. Several small fires were reported that week as well before precipitation fell to mitigate the dry conditions.

For the late winter and early spring months, La Niña is still expected to split the RMA from north to south. The warmest and driest conditions are forecast to remain across southern and eastern Colorado into most of Nebraska and Kansas, while cooler and more moist weather should be confined to Wyoming, South Dakota, and portions of northern Colorado. Climate models also indicate a gradual weakening of La Niña during the spring. The transition to neutral conditions also introduces the possibility of an earlier onset of a transitional weather pattern that could bring frequent frontal passages, strong winds, and attendant lightning across portions of the High Plains.

The northern half of the geographic area has benefitted from several wetter, colder storms since late November, but the southern half has not seen appreciable moisture so far this winter. The outlook for the RMA is for normal significant fire potential across the northern half of the area and western Colorado from February through May.

Above normal significant fire potential is forecast across portions of Kansas and eastern Colorado. The above normal potential is due to the persistence of abnormally warm and dry conditions that are expected to continue through early spring, combined with strong winds associated with the passage of low-pressure systems. The large fire history over the High Plains also points to a substantial increase in activity starting in February and persisting through April.

Eastern Area: Near normal fire potential is forecast across the majority of the Eastern Area February into May.

Soil moisture and precipitation 30-to-90-day anomalies were below normal across parts of the Great Lakes and northern New England at the end of January. Long-range drought conditions were indicated across the central Great Lakes and far northern New England at the end of January. Near to above normal fuel moisture levels are forecast over the majority of the Eastern Area into the early spring given the precipitation forecast.

The spring fire season may begin later than normal across parts of the Eastern Area where above normal precipitation trends manifest. Warmer than normal temperatures are expected across portions of the southern tier of the Eastern Area February into March. Cooler than normal temperatures are forecast across the northwestern third of the Great Lakes March into May. Near to above normal precipitation is expected over the majority of the Eastern Area through the rest of the winter into spring.

Southern Area: Above normal significant fire potential is expected on the southern Plains of Oklahoma and Texas into spring. Above normal potential is expected to expand across large portions of Texas during the outlook period. Above normal potential will begin to retreat westward due to green-up in April and May. Above normal potential is forecast for inland portions of the Florida Peninsula into southeast Georgia for February before spreading to much of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas in March and April.

Dry conditions have continued this winter across much of Texas and Oklahoma into parts of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Florida. Above normal precipitation (100-150% of average) was observed across much of the southeast US into the Mid-Atlantic, which should dampen fire concerns in the short-term there. Precipitation across much of Florida and southern Georgia was below normal and that trend is expected to continue, as a general warm and dry pattern is forecast for late winter into early spring.

There was significant fire activity in Texas and Oklahoma until mid-January. Much of Oklahoma, Texas, Florida, and the Gulf Coast continue to be dry, with drought expanding and exacerbating. Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) values remain high across much of Texas and Oklahoma with values of 400-600, along with scattered pockets of 600+ in western Texas and Oklahoma. Similar KBDI values of 400-600 remain across central and southern Florida, with areas of 600+ in south Florida. Above normal precipitation in January led to reduced drought in the Carolinas and Virginia. Significant fuel loading from last year's rain continues to be an issue across much of Texas and Oklahoma and will be through spring.

The remainder of the dormant season should see a general increase in fire activity across the southern Plains, Gulf Coast, and Atlantic Coast, given the expectation of warm and dry conditions continuing into the spring. It will not be until green-up and the start of the convective season, that a decrease in fire activity is expected in many of these areas.

Due to recent precipitation, above normal significant fire potential was reduced to normal potential for the Carolinas and Virginia in February. However, forecasts of above normal significant fire potential were expanded northward into the Carolinas by March. Above normal fire potential is forecast to continue across much of Oklahoma and west-central Texas during February and March, before retreating westwards onto the High Plains during April and May due to green-up. Above normal fire potential is forecast to continue for much of Florida through the spring. Additionally, drought across portions of central and east Texas into the Lower Mississippi Valley will be monitored for above normal potential in the coming weeks to months.

Outlook Objectives

The National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook is intended as a decision support tool for wildland fire managers, providing an assessment of current weather and fuels conditions and how these will evolve in the next four months. The objective is to assist fire managers in making proactive decisions that will improve protection of life, property, and natural resources, increase fire fighter safety and effectiveness, and reduce firefighting costs.

For questions about this outlook, please contact the National Interagency Fire Center at (208) 387-5050 or contact your local Geographic Area Predictive Services unit.

Note: Additional Geographic Area assessments may be available at the specific GACC websites. The GACC websites can also be accessed through the NICC webpage at:
http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/outlooks.htm